

Christ's Doctrine of Future Punishment—Life: a Season of Probation.

Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye can not come. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go ye can not come. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.—JOHN viii: 21-24.

It has been almost universally accepted, as a doctrine of both natural and revealed religion, that the present life is a season of probation; that men are here on trial with reference to their ultimate condition in the future world; that our happiness or misery for the eternity after death, will depend upon the character we form, and the life we live, before death. The more elevated class of infidels, even, have conceded this truth; and Lord Herbert mentions it as one of the five fundamental points of natural religion, which he deemed to be sufficient for belief, and to be taught by human reason without the aid of Revelation. Atheists, Pantheists, and the lower class of Deists, have indeed denied the doctrine, usually because they denied, also, either the existence of God, or the immortality of the soul.

It has been reserved for the nineteenth century to produce a sect denominating itself Christian, and professing to receive the Bible as its rule of faith, which discards this important tenet. Thus Rev. Thomas Starr King of Boston, says, in a sermon recently published on

The Doctrine of Endless Punishment, "Nothing, it seems to me, has wrought or can work so much damage to Christianity, as the belief, that by the decree of God, this life is the final probation of all souls for an eternal destiny." Again, (p. 4,) "Ordinary orthodoxy tells men that unless they live according to a certain scheme of thought and service in this life, a doom of misery will be executed upon them in the life to come, from which God will not allow them any escape or return. This is the doctrine with which we take issue." Once more, he declares that "it is utterly impossible for a man to believe in an infinitely perfect Ruler of the universe, if he believes that a never-ending penalty of pain has been deliberately established by that Ruler for all those who pass out of this life unreconciled to his will."

It is not my purpose to discuss the subject on the broad and somewhat uncertain ground of mere human reason, nor even to consider what is the testimony of the Bible, as a volume, on this important point. My inquiry is simply, What did Jesus Christ teach as to the future life? Therefore I now ask, What did he teach respecting the connection of the present life with future destiny?

Was it the doctrine of Jesus that the present life is a season of probation for eternity?

The visible appearance of this life certainly favors such a doctrine. It is for some reason divided off from the remainder of our existence. When a few years have elapsed, three-score and ten or four-score at the longest, we pass away to some other state of existence. What means this previous life, so separate from that which comes after? Why is it placed by itself, with but the single gate of death as a means

of exit, through which when we pass, we leave behind all that was visible of our nature to our fellows, so that we seem to cease to be? Here is a fact which demands explanation from every believer in the immortality of the soul. An eternity of being is our portion, and yet we enter upon that eternity from a previous and quite separate stage of existence. We affirm that the mystery is solved by regarding the present life as a probation for eternity, and that here we have a distinct and all-important work to perform—a work which requires a time of its own, as separate from eternity as seed-time in the natural world is from harvest, and as the period of a child's education at school is from subsequent manhood.

And is not this the idea of the Savior, when he says, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: *the night cometh when no man can work*. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."—John ix: 4, 5. By these words our Lord evidently teaches that, as he had a work to perform, which, if done at all, must be done on earth and previous to his death; so also every man has his day of life, beyond which lies simple night, or a state of being which terminates *work*, and provides only *wages*. "The night cometh when no man can work." That the word "day" is thus used by the Savior in a probationary sense, may be corroborated by the passage in Luke xix: 41, 42: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, *at least in this thy day*, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Allowing that this reference is simply to the Jews as a nation, and to the calamities which were about to come upon them, because they had wearied out Divine

patience, you will observe, that he calls the time of their national probation, their "day," the close of which would be followed by destroying judgments. And this is the sense in which he tells us as individuals, that we are to work "while it is day," because "the night cometh in which no man can work;" where there is a plain allusion to the words of Solomon, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." Death is at hand, which closes probation and introduces retribution. Is not this the natural interpretation of the language, and are the words easily reconcilable with a probation which does not cease at death, but runs on without limit, allowing every man to work, in the highest and most important sense, forever; in a day whose sun sets not in night; never losing his opportunity, nor seeing his chance of life diminish?

And what construction shall we place upon the passage, in which Jesus informs those who rejected him, that he was soon to depart; that they should die in their sins; and that they should not come to the place to which he was going? His departure surely referred to his withdrawing from this world. The place to which he was going was, beyond question, heaven. Yet he assures them that they can not be admitted to his company in that world, and, as a reason for it, or else as another way of stating the same truth, he says, "Ye shall die in your sins." Evidently Christ thought that it was a fearful thing to die in a state of sin, unforgiven and unsanctified; to pass into eternity impenitent, clinging to lifelong transgression. But if the present life has no connection with the life to come, or if probation, while

commencing here, runs on after death, how can we harmonize the fact with the words and solemn emphasis of the Savior? If a man may be saved and reach heaven at last, even though he close the present life in an unregenerate condition, without love to God or faith in the Redeemer, how could it be so dreadful for the unbelieving Jews to die in their sins? Nor can the force of this passage be evaded by dwelling on the last clause only, and referring to chapter xiii, verse 33, in which Jesus says to his disciples, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me, and, as I said unto the Jews, 'Whither I go, ye can not come,' so now I say unto you." For observe the difference in the two passages. 1. The idea which I derive from the passage before us, does not depend merely upon the expression, "Whither I go, ye can not come," but also upon the solemn declaration, "Ye shall die in your sins," which intensifies and explains the meaning. 2. The Savior gives a special reason, of a spiritual nature, for applying these phrases to the Jews, which did not apply to the disciples. He says, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world: I said, *therefore*, unto you, that ye shall die in your sins," etc. 3. This passage, with its context, contains no limiting expressions to parry the force of the intensifying clauses, while the words in the thirteenth chapter are carefully explained to have only a partial or temporary application to the disciples; for in the third verse following, we read, "Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, *thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me hereafter.*" If these last words had been added in the case of the Jews the declaration of the Savior had been robbed of

its terrors; but without these, and with the solemn warning and prophecy, "Ye shall die in your sins," it is evident that he meant to imply that they would never reach his presence in the world of glory; that death would find them impenitent and forever undone.

4. The vile 'taunt of the Jews, in return, shows, that they understood him to speak of a future and eternal doom; for they sought to retort upon him with a bold malignity, by imputing an intention of suicide, (which they believed would be punished with the lowest hell,) misrepresenting, purposely, his meaning, and saying, in effect, "Well, if he is bent on committing suicide and plunging into hell, true enough, we none of us will ever follow!" Thus perfectly understanding that he meant, by the words in question, to exclude them from heaven, they blasphemously put themselves there and shut him out!

That we may classify the testimony of our Savior on this subject, we will consider his teaching as related to three connected points.

1. Passages which so describe the result of deeds done here, as to imply that the present life is probationary and does not exhaust itself in this world. Thus, in rebuking those who gave only selfish entertainments, feasting their relatives, friends, and wealthy acquaintances, who could do the same in return, and forgetting to aid the poor who could make no earthly recompense, he said, (Luke xiv: 12, etc.): "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed: for they can not recompense thee: for thou

shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." These words clearly teach that the good deeds of life will be rewarded hereafter, on a specific occasion, denominated "the resurrection of the just;" which phrase again implies, that there is a resurrection peculiar to the just, the glory and reward of which the sinful may not share.

Consider, also, the implication of the declaration and question, (Mark viii: 35, 36 :) "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" By this language we are instructed in terms of thrilling emphasis, that by a deed here we may peril our entire hereafter; and that an act by which we save our present life, at the expense of Christ's cause, will occasion the loss of our eternal life; so that the gain of all that this world can afford, may be an act of measureless folly, because resulting in the loss of the soul, or, as Luke reports it, in becoming a "castaway." Nor is the argument at all weakened, if, as objectors contend, the word "soul" be rendered "life," as in the previous verse, where the same Greek word is so rendered twice; for the reference is plainly to the life of the soul, in contrast with that of the body, and the life which we are to lead after death, in contrast with the life which we live in this world. Christ says plainly that life here may be death hereafter, and death here life hereafter—all because man is now on probation for eternity.

In like manner, the Beatitudes point to the effect which certain states of mind and of life here, will have upon our future condition. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, [which

they shall shortly enjoy.] Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted, [in the world where the tears are wiped from every eye.] Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth, [as a type of their everlasting inheritance above.] Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled, [when they participate in the perfect and endless holiness of heaven.] Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy, [in that solemn hour when all men will need mercy at the bar of God.] Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God, [with the open vision of the next life.] Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God, [and acknowledged as such, when crowns and thrones are distributed.] Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, [whose glories shall repay their sorrows.] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for *great is your reward in heaven*: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." These eternal benedictions upon the righteous, necessarily imply parallel maledictions upon the unrighteous; and, indeed, Luke, in his account of the sermon, adds the latter likewise, saying, "But woe unto you that are vile! for ye have received your consolation,"—all the comfort you are ever to have. "Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger," that is, hunger after an experience of bliss which you shall never enjoy. "Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep," that is, hereafter, when the tears are forever wiped from the eyes of the holy. The sum of all, then, is this, that the pure in this life, however lowly,

despised, or persecuted, are truly blessed and enviable, because of the glorious reward of their holiness in the life to come; while sinners, however rich and mirthful now, are in a wretched condition, because of their impending retributions in eternity.

And this very truth it was, which Jesus illustrated in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The purple, the fine linen, the daily feasting of this life, being associated with sin in the rich man, were followed by corresponding torment in the spirit-world; while the rags, and sores, and poverty, of Lazarus, being found in company with a pure heart, gave place to the honor and bliss of heaven, in the very bosom of Abraham, the head of the Jewish race, and "the father of all the faithful."

So, also, the same striking thought, that the marked contrasts in the condition of men, as now seen, will be precisely reversed in the awful hereafter, because of present distinctions of character, is conveyed in the passage, (Mark x: 23-31,) which begins with the prospects of worldly rich men, and concludes with those of disciples who have been impoverished through their love of Jesus. The rich young ruler had just departed, grieved that when he could not serve God and mammon both, Jesus said to his disciples, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." This was one picture—a rich sinner passing from all his wealth to be a poor outcast in eternity. Now for the other picture—the poor saint going to his eternal reward. Peter remarked, "Lo, we have left all and followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you,

There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold *now in this time*, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions ; *and in the world to come, eternal life.*" The evident individual application of these words, precludes any attempt to interpret them of national judgments and rewards, or to bring in that universal solvent of hard orthodox passages, the destruction of Jerusalem. It is not astonishing, after these fervid and painful contrasts, that the Savior added, " But many that are first shall be last ; and the last first." But we must pass to consider,

2. The passages in which Jesus urges men now to fulfill certain conditions of salvation, as the only means of insuring eternal life. The Savior did not address those who were commencing an original probation of mere law and justice, with the fact of sin yet before them, as did our first parents in Eden. He "came to seek and to save that which was lost," providing the ransom in his own sufferings and death, the winning and attractive power in his own life and character, and the personal and efficient agency in the Holy Spirit. He offered a free and full pardon to all who would *now* repent and believe, promising them "everlasting life." It is remarkable that he never drops a syllable to give encouragement to the idea that men will have any other probation than that which they *now* enjoy ; that he never intimates that salvation, if rejected here, will embrace them in another world. He went about preaching as though the present life afforded the only hope for lost men, calling upon them to repent lest utter destruction come upon them.

When a startling event occurred in daily life, such as the crushing of eighteen men by a falling tower, and the massacre of a company of sacrificers, at the very altar, by the Roman governor, he seized upon the facts to impress his hearers with the certainty that a more awful doom would overtake all the impenitent. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." When Nicodemus came for instruction by night, he told the Jewish Rabbi, "Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God." Present regeneration must be the precursor of future blessedness. In dwelling upon his own mission as a Savior, he insisted ever upon the necessity of faith in those to whom he was here offered: "For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. * * He that *believeth* on him is not condemned; but he that *believeth not* is condemned already, because he hath *not believed* in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. * * He that *believeth* on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that *believeth not* the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one who seeth the Son and *believeth* on him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."—John iii: 14-18, 36; vi: 40. Thus did Jesus continually preach the necessity of using the present life as a gracious probation during which to repent and believe, that his hearers might participate in the glory of the resurrection which awaits the righteous. This view of life occasioned his exceeding earnestness

in exhorting men to improve it, saying, (Luke xiii : 24 :) "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Why will they not be able? Because the appointed time has gone by, and the gate is closed, to turn on its golden hinges no more; as appears from the words which immediately follow: "When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Surely here is the solemn doctrine of probation—of a period during which men may successfully strive to enter heaven through the strait gate of faith and repentance, followed by a time, when God rises up and shuts to the door, and there is no opening, though despairing sinners beat against it never so vehemently, and claim to be friends. After reading the discourses of Jesus which are saturated with such truth, and in which the necessity of present conversion is urged with so much power and pathos, while not a hint is dropped, that eternity offers any hope for those who "die in their sins," we are not surprised then to find that the Rev. Thomas Starr King, the great Boston champion and orator of the restoration form of Universalism, is compelled to say, in the two sermons already quoted, "I do not find the doctrine of the ultimate sal-

vation of all souls clearly stated in any text, or in any discourse, that has been reported from the lips of Christ. I do not think we can fairly maintain that the final restoration of all men is a prominent and explicit doctrine of the four Gospels." No, indeed, but the contrary view is continually prominent and most fearfully explicit. And this will be still clearer, when we consider :

3. The passages in which Jesus teaches that the final award of the judgment will turn upon the deeds of the present life. No other preacher has given us so many glimpses of the scenes of the future world as the Savior. His discourses abound in references to a coming judgment in the eternal world, where the destiny of men is to be decided. It is impossible to cite them all, but in those from which extracts shall be made, the point to be noticed is, that the object of the judgment is declared to be, to review and recompense character formed and deeds done in this world, thus establishing the fact that the present life is probationary. With regard to this we find such testimony as follows :

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."—Matt. xii : 36, 37. The phraseology shows throughout, first, that it is a future judgment of individuals in eternity, and not of nations in this world, that is referred to; and secondly, that the scrutiny will include our very words spoken on earth, because habitual speech reveals the heart. Again, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and *then* he shall reward every man *according to his works*."—Matt. xvi : 27. Nothing could be more explicit in showing the basis

of the judgment to be the previous conduct of man in this life. Again, "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of my words, *in this sinful and adulterous generation*, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, *when he cometh* in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."—Mark viii: 38. Also, "Whosoever shall confess me *before men*, him shall the Son of man also confess *before the angels of God*. But he that denieth me *before men*, shall be denied *before the angels of God*." Thus we are taught that our treatment of Christ and of his cause here, on earth, before our fellow-men, will decide the treatment which we shall receive in turn from him before the angels amid the solemn pomp of the judgment. In this connection you will recall the words of the Savior, concerning those who should refuse to receive his disciples when they came preaching the Gospel; that it should be "more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that city," (Matt. x: 15;) also, how the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida were threatened with a heavier doom in that day than would come upon the people of Tyre and Sidon, because the former sinned against greater light by rejecting Christ. (Luke x: 13, 14.) You will likewise remember how many parables Jesus spoke to enforce the same idea of future account, at the judgment, of the deeds of life; such as the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the servants watching for their lord, the pounds, the talents, the fish caught in the net, and the tares in the field, with the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus—all implying that the absent Savior and King will return and reward his friends and punish his enemies, according to their conduct in this world. Turn, now, to the Savior's de-

scription of the judgment in the twenty-fifth of Matthew, and the same two points will stand forth on the very face of the narrative. It is the award of doom for eternity; for to the one class it is said, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" and to the other class, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" while it is added at the close, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal"—the very same word in the original being used to denote the duration of the award to both. And for what, or in view of what, is the sentence pronounced? Read the entire account and you will see that it is in view of deeds done here, by which we proved our love or hatred to Christ and his people. "Inasmuch as ye have done" thus and so, when you were living and my people were with you as my representatives, therefore receive the gracious reward; and, on the other hand, "Inasmuch as ye did it not," in similar circumstances, take your just punishment.

Thus, by a three-fold line of argument, I have deduced from our Savior's words, his doctrine of the relation of the present life to eternity. First, I gave his view of present conduct, and showed, that he held that it does not exhaust itself here, but influences our future character and destiny. Secondly, I presented Christ's statements as to the conditions upon which his salvation would be of avail, and the time when those conditions must be fulfilled, by which we were conducted to the same result. Thirdly, I drew attention to his accounts of the judgment-day, by which it appeared that the decisions then made would be final, and would be in accordance with the character formed

in this world. May I not, then, claim that Jesus taught that the present life is a probation for eternity?

Reader, do you believe this? Are you intellectually convinced that, if the Lord Jesus Christ spake the truth, this present life is the seed-time of an eternal harvest? What, then, are you doing? What seed are you sowing? Is your eye fixed upon the harvest, and do you have daily, ay, hourly reference to it? As you rise in the morning, do you think that another day of probation has begun; and do you inwardly resolve to make it answer the true end of life as a preparation for eternity? How pass the weeks, the months, and the years with you? As seasons of mere earthly enjoyment, or as gracious periods of labor whose fruit shall be hereafter? Oh, bear it in thought, ye men to whom God has given mind, that if this life be the probation for eternity, that fact becomes its most noble and most solemn characteristic, constituting its meaning, redeeming it from insignificance, and elevating it to true sublimity. Do not, then, degrade it to a mere earthly and sensual use, to be a servant of the body rather than of the soul, and to eventuate in an utter failure to secure the grand end for which you were created. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."